

MRSA Skin Infections

A frequent cause of skin infections is a bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph). Most of these skin infections are minor. However, Staph bacteria can also cause more serious infections such as pneumonia and bloodstream infections. Some Staph bacteria are resistant to certain antibiotics and are known as MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*).

What is a MRSA skin infection?

A MRSA skin infection can be a pimple, rash, boil, or an open wound. MRSA is often misdiagnosed as spider bites. MRSA bacteria are commonly found on the skin of healthy persons. MRSA infections often begin with an injury to the skin. Symptoms of MRSA infection include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness of the skin, and boils or blisters. Sometimes it does not cause any problems; sometimes it causes minor infections, such as pimples or boils. If left untreated, it can cause serious skin infections or worse.

How do MRSA skin infections spread?

MRSA lives on skin and survives on objects for 24 hours or more. MRSA can rub off on the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during rigorous skin-to-skin contact. Or, the MRSA bacteria can come off of the infected skin of a person onto a shared object, and get onto the skin of the next person who uses it. Examples of commonly shared objects include towels, soap, razors, and athletic equipment.

How can I prevent myself or my family members from getting infected?

Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Keep cuts and scrapes clean with soap and water. Avoid skin contact and sharing personal items with anyone you suspect could have a MRSA skin infection. When using protective gloves to treat infected area, remove and dispose of properly; wash your hands with soap and water after removing them. Do not share personal items with other persons who might have skin infections.

What should I do if I think I have a skin infection?

Consult your healthcare provider as soon as possible if you think you have a skin infection. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. Be sure to follow directions from your doctor or healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better. Not taking all of your pills leads to stronger, antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

If I was told by my healthcare provider that I have a MRSA skin infection, how do I keep others from getting infected?

- Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from infected wounds is very infectious.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching the infected skin.
- Regularly clean your bathroom, kitchen, and all other rooms, as well as your personal items. Wash clothes and other items that become soiled with hot water or bleach, when possible.

- Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying them also helps to kill bacteria in clothes.
- Tell any healthcare provider that treats you during the infection that you have an antibiotic-resistant MRSA skin infection.

For specific concerns about Staph/MRSA skin infections, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.